

## AN EXOTIC-ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS OF KIRAN DESAI'S HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD

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### Abstract

Outstanding among the women novelists who have enhanced Indian English literature and won honour and International acclaim are: Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Santha Rama Rau, Bharati Mukherjee, Kamala Das, Veena Nagpal, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. She appeared in literary aura in 1997 with her first publication in the *New Yorker* and in *Mirrorwork*, and in an anthology “50 Years of Indian Writing” edited by Salman Rushdie in which *Strange Happenings in the Guava Orchard* was the concluding piece. Unquestionably, the novel which has won the celebrated Betty Trask Award is set in a small town Shahkot, that stands for a proto-typical Indian urban place with bazaars, schools, government offices, banks and its inhabitants. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) is an ironical novel satirizing Indian outlook, its sense of religiosity where anything sells in the name of religious conviction. The vital gyrator of this plot, on whom the very ‘fabula’ is revolving round, is Sampath Chawla- whose journey from a back seated post-office clerk to an elevated ‘Monkey-baba’ – is woven with finest humorous strokes. Sampath, the unmotivated son of a middle class family craved to flee the alarming responsibilities of his humdrum life and decided to climb upon a guava tree to live there in serene meditation. The inhabitants of Shahkot started worshipping him as a hermit and solicited his baffling counsels to resolve their problems. In short, the novel recounts the impact of supernatural and paranormal mythic reflection on Indian psyche and its compliance to traditional orthodoxy. Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature. Kiran Desai is a much-preferred sizzling author of the first decade of the twenty first century. She, with the very publication of her former novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* has been globally applauded to be one of the finest novelists in the trend. My humble attempt here is to read this debut work of Desai from the point of view of the inter-connection between the world of environment and the material world of humans.

Having emerged on the Indian English landscape in late 1990s, Kiran Desai, a young and vibrant author with innate artistic flairs, has created a discrete place for herself in the constellation of Indian women novelists in English. She is the daughter of the renowned fictionist Anita Desai, who explored in the Indian English novels, concerns like socio-political, moral, racial, emigrational, psycho-analytical as well as essential man-human-relationships in the post-independence era. In particular, innovative efforts of existing women novelists have been quite splendid during the last decades of the past century. In the series of Booker Prize winners after Ruth Pravar Zabwawla, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy; Kiran Desai has celebrated her name and extinguished the obscurity and despondency in the family surroundings which had anticipated her mother to be triumphant over the coveted honour.

Ecocriticism, also known as ‘literary ecology’ or ‘green’ literary studies, is a field of environmental movement that emerged in the late twentieth century as a somewhat deferred reaction in Humanities especially in the 1960s and 1970s. It is an interdisciplinary study of Ecology and Literary Criticism which is unusual as a combination of a natural science and a humanistic discipline. By analogy, Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationship with his physical environment is reflected in literature. A number of early ecocritics looked at the movement chiefly as a way of “rescuing” literature from the ongoing distancing between readers, text and the world, that had been ushered in by the Structuralist, Formalists as well as Deconstructive studies in theoretical realm. These ecocritical nonconformists sought to reconnect the work of nature writing with environmental understanding and vice versa, to prove congenial eco-friendly poise between the two. Since this new term came into the critical paradigm, critics have tried to define it in various ways. Let us first study some of the definitions of the term ‘ecocriticism’. The first definition is to be found in the ‘Introduction’ to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), an important anthology of American ecocriticism:

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty and Fromm xix)

Ecocriticism is, then, an avowedly subjective way of study, as its comparison with Feminism and Marxism propounds. Ecocritics usually tie their cultural analysis explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda. In this respect, ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns. Greg Garrard, in the introductory chapter titled ‘Pollution’ in the famous Routledge guide to *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*, defines ecocriticism from a broader perspective. According to him, ecocriticism is ‘the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself’ (Garrard 5). Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneering theorists of ecocriticism, explains in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* (1996) that ‘ecocriticism’ is derived from the Greek words: *Oikos* and *Kritos*. The term ‘ecocriticism’, which is formed by the combination of these two words, means according to William Howarth, ‘a

person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action. . . So, *Oikos* is nature, a place Edward Hoagland calls “our wildest home,” and *Kritos* is an arbiter of taste who want the house kept in good order, no boots or dishes strewn about to ruin the original decor.” (Glotfelty and Fromm 69)

With the environmental crisis comes a crisis of the imagination, a need to find new ways to understand nature and humanity’s relation to it. This is the challenge Lawrence Buell takes up in his book *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), the most ambitious study till date of how literature represents the natural environment. With Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) as a touchstone, Buell gives us a far-reaching account of environmental perception, the place of nature in the history of western thought, and the consequences for literary scholarship of attempting to imagine a more “ecocentric” way of being. In doing so, he provides a major new understanding of Thoreau’s achievement and, at the same time, a profound rethinking of our literary and cultural reflections on nature. The green tradition in American writing commands Buell’s special attention, particularly environmental nonfiction from colonial times to the present. Intricate and challenging in its arguments, yet engagingly and elegantly written, *The Environmental Imagination* is a major work of scholarship, one that establishes a new basis for reading American nature writing. *The Environmental Imagination* does not stop short at the edge of the woods. Emphasizing the influence of the physical environment on individual and collective perception, his next book, *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) offers a conception of the physical environment—whether built or natural— simultaneously found and constructed, and treats imaginative representations of it as acts of both discovery and invention. A number of the chapters develop this idea through parallel studies of figures identified with either “natural” or urban settings: John Muir and Jane Addams; Aldo Leopold and William Faulkner; Robinson Jeffers and Theodore Dreiser; Wendell Berry and Gwendolyn Brooks. Focusing on nineteenth and twentieth century writers, but ranging freely across national borders, his book re-imagines city and country as a single complex landscape. That concern leads it to take an exceptionally strong interest in which environmental motifs are selected for what kinds of portrayal. The environmental (ist) subtexts of works whose interests are ostensibly directed elsewhere (e.g., toward social, political, and economic relations) may be no less telling in this regard than cases of the opposite sort where human figures have been evacuated for the sake of stressing environmentalism.’ (*The Future of Environmental Criticism*, p.39) All inquiry into artistic rendition of physical environment must sooner or later reckon with the ‘meta-question’ of how to construe the relation between the world of a text and the world of historical or lived experience. The majority of ecocritics, whether or not they theorize their positions, look upon their texts of reference as refractions of physical environments and human interaction with those environments, notwithstanding the artifactual properties of textual representation and their mediation by ideological and other socio-historical factors. Many environmental critics, both first-wave and second-wave, often show what superficially seems an old-fashioned propensity for “realistic” modes of representation, and a preoccupation with questions of factual accuracy of environmental representation. At the end of the book, Buell concludes thus, ‘environmental criticism, not only in literary studies but also throughout the human sciences, cannot (at least not yet) claim the *methodological* originality that was injected into literary studies by (say) new critical formalism and by deconstruction. . . I myself believe that environmental criticism at the turn of the twenty-first century will also come to be looked back upon as a moment that did produce a cluster of challenging intellectual work, a constellation rather than a single titanic

book or figure, that established environmentality as a permanent concern for literary and other humanists, and through that even more than through acts of pedagogical or activist outreach helped instil and reinforce public concern about the fate of the earth, about humankind's responsibility to act on that awareness, about the shame of environmental injustice, and about the importance of vision and imagination in changing minds, lives, and policy as well as composing words, poems, and books. There! That is my prophecy.' (*The Future of Environmental Criticism*. p.143-144)

My venture through this paper then will primarily concentrate on Kiran Desai's debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* with an aim to read it from the perspective of ecocriticism. From a thematic point of view, the novel is an engrossing one, where the elements like satire, hilarity, absurdity, comical appearance of the characters enormously set the milieu and the idiocy of human beings; all spinning round a delicate, dreamy, docile as well as appalling 'fabula' and 'syuzhet'. The novel is comprised mostly of eccentric characters: Sampath (the anti-heroic protagonist), Sampath's mother Kulfī, Sampath's sister Pinky, Sampath's father Mr. R.K. Chawla, and his grandmother Ammaji. Apart from Sampath's family members, there are minor characters like the Hungry hop boy, CMO, District Magistrate, Mr. Gupta, Miss Jyotsna, and the Brigadier. The monkeys, as animal characters in the novel, play a very vital role. This fictional tale revolves round an uninteresting, hilarious funny incident of an apparently stupid, moron's detestation of mundane routine bound tasks and a frantic search for escapism. Though this search is not as poetical as the speaker's in Keats' 'Ode to the Nightingale', where the pangs of the poet is scripted thus, 'Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget/ what thou among the leaves hast never known/the weariness, the fever, and the fret/ Here, where men sit and hear each other groan' (21-24) but Sampath's flight is a very prosaic one. Hating the boredom of a clerical job in the Post office, one day he flees off and chooses an antic guava orchard as his abode. The twist- in-tale begins from there. Sampath's settlement in the guava orchard is apparently an erratic decision, but the family members of Sampath make an attempt to give this apparent stupid decision a whole new dimension. They transform Sampath's eccentricity into a fake hermit's attitude, projecting him as a saintly figure, and this ultimately proves to be commercially successful projection. Everything was going on finely until the monkeys – the permanent inhabitants of the guava orchard – get addicted by liquors and in their stupor they start ravaging the town. This single most action runs throughout the text and it ends up almost surrealistically, with miraculous disappearance of Sampath from his dwelling cot.

Kiran Desai, in an interview, admits that the story of *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was inspired by a realistic event:

I started with a very small idea, really. I'd read a story in *The Times of India* and heard about a character from many people, a man who was a very famous hermit in India who really did climb up a tree, who lived in a tree for many, many years until he died. He died last year I believe. So I began to wonder that it was about someone like this who would do something as extreme as to spend his life in a tree. So it started really with that character, and then the story built up around it. (Exclusive Interview, [http:// www.themanbookerprize.com/perspective](http://www.themanbookerprize.com/perspective), dated 19-12-2007)

The novel begins with Mr. Chawla reading a report in a newspaper about a prevalent draught in Shahkot, the locale of the first novel. After reading the report, Mr. Chawla is engaged in sorting out the probable causes for the draught:



‘Problems have been located in the cumulus that have become overly heated’, read Mr. Chawla from the newspaper. ‘It is all a result of volcanic ash thrown up in the latest spurt of activity in Tierra del Fuego. And a little later he reported to whoever might be listening: ‘The problem lies in the currents off the West African coastline and the unexplained molecular movement observed in the polar ice-caps.’ And, ‘Iraq attempts to steal monsoon by deliberately creating low pressure over desert provinces and deflecting winds from India.’ And even: ‘Hungarian musician offers to draw rain clouds from Europe to India via the music of his flute.’ (1)

This sort of rumour, reporting several causes behind that utter dryness, is the specifically set backdrop against which the novel begins. The setting of the story is in a small town, Shahkot where the weather is intolerably hot. Many people suggest offering a variety of probable solutions:

Mr. Chawla himself submitted a proposal to the forestry department for the cutting and growing of vegetation in elaborate patterns; the army proposed the scattering and driving of clouds by jet planes flying in a special geometric formation; the police a frog wedding to be performed by temple priests. Vermaji of the university invented a giant fan which he hoped would attract the southern monsoon clouds by creating a wind tunnel moving north toward the Himalayas. (2)

In short, everyone is worried about the uncertainty of immediate monsoon. The unbearable heat and dry condition depress the local people. This detailed description of the dry and hot weather at the beginning of the novel is important because it is related to the year of birth of the chief protagonist Sampath. By late September the heat and lack of rain combine to produce terrible crisis. The condition degenerates to such an extent that relief camps are set up by the Red Cross Society in the west region of Shahkot. The ration shop fails to distribute adequate amount of rice and lentils, and the prices of essential commodities rise higher. The reasons given for such conditions are thus, both human and natural; and the suggestions mentioned above are the products of human mind, hinged on the essential fantasy signifying a typical human penchant to believe in the farfetched ideas when trapped in natural catastrophes. During this terrible crisis, Sampath is born as an auspicious sign to the Shahkotians. The connection between ‘terrible condition of draught’ and Kulfi growing ‘bigger as it got worst’ (3) has the make-believe element in it. During the period of pregnancy, she is so enormously large as if ‘to be claiming all the earth’s energy for herself, sapping it dry, leaving it withered, shrivelled and yellow’ (3). Despite all cares and suggestions, Kulfi keeps on her practices: ‘Her stomach grew larger, her dream of eating more extravagant. The house seemed to shrink’ (7). As she is fed up with the claustrophobic physical environment all around, she throws herself in the imaginary world of ‘painting on the wall with a feeling bordering on hysteria’ (7). She is changed into a subject of oddity as termed by everyone. Obsessed with the idea of food, she keeps on reflecting in her past-time:

But Kulfi was not thinking of the baby in her belly like a little fish. She was thinking of fish themselves. Of fish in many forms. Of fish big enough and good enough to feed the hunger that had overtaken her in the past months like a wave. She thought of fish curries and fish kebabs. Of pomfret, bekti, ruhi. Of shoals of whiskered shrimp. Of chewy mussels. She thought of food abundant in all its many incarnations. Of fenugreek

and camel milk, yam and corn. Mangoes and coconuts and custard apples. Mushrooms sprouting like umbrellas in the monsoon season. Nuts, wrinkled in their shells, brown-skinned, milky-fleshed. (4)

The whole description has an exotic and fantastic aroma in it. At one level it is an escape, and on the other it is a 'simulacrum' of her wish-fulfilment. The two levels of reality: one which is 'there' before her, and the 'other' which she perceives; are constantly intermingled in her unconscious, and at this point Sampath is born, his birth symbolises the attainment of reality for Kulfi. These paranormal and freakish activities can be read as premonitions of something quite menacing for the baby. And this, no doubt, is an instance of a mystic deed:

. . . all of a sudden a shadow fell across the sun and magically, as quickly as a winter's day tumbles into smoky evening and then night, the white-lit afternoon deepened into the colour of old parchment as the sky darkened. Curtains billowed white out of every window. Bits of news paper and old plastic bags turned cartwheels in the indigo streets. The air thinned and stirred in a breeze that brought goose bumps out upon her arms. 'Look!' Kulfi shouted. 'Here comes the rain!' (9)

Kulfi is the first person to predict the coming of rain. She, in this way, can be compared to the Mother Nature; pure, slender, delicate and dishevelled. Whereas, Kulfi can be delineated as nature itself, her husband Mr. Chawla is always in his civilised mood, prescribing dos and don'ts appropriate for her, though she is least interested in such petty recommendations:

'You must sit down and rest after any exercise,' he advised. And: 'You must stand up and exercise regularly and diligently.' And: 'Don't eat raw fruit anymore.' And: 'Don't sing songs and tire yourself out. Don't drink tea on an empty stomach. Keep yourself extra clean. Wash your hair, take a nap, put your legs up in the air and do bicycling exercises.' (6)

The implicit connection between the natural rain and Kulfi is best understood when one finds Kulfi enjoying the rain in the following manner, 'stretched out further still, and further until the rain took up all the space inside her head' (10). She flings into the rain, 'soaking wet', enjoying herself against the warning of precaution. The rain continues and Sampath is born: "the storm still raging, rain pouring through windows that would not stay closed and flooding in beneath the doors, Sampath was born. As his face, with a brown birthmark upon one cheek, appeared to the cheers of his family, there was a roaring overhead that almost split their eardrums, followed by a vast crash in the street outside" (11). Sampath's 'birth' and 'birthmark on his face' are taken as an indication of a spiritual identity of a godly persona. Rain is the traditional symbol of fertility and rejuvenation; it has a religious connotation in Hindu society. When seen from a cultural point of view, it may be said that Sampath's birth preceded by rain is a means of salvation for the famine cursed land. The birth of Sampath is taken to be a miracle, a supernatural agency born to save the land and the people:

Attempting to include Kulfi in their high spirits, the neighbours assured her that her son was destined for greatness, that the world, large and mysterious beyond Shahkot, had taken notice of him. 'Look! Even people in Sweden have remembered to send a birthday present.' And: 'Let's name him Sampath,' they said. 'Good fortune.' For though he might not be very plump or very fair, he was triumphantly and indisputably male. (12-13)

Sampath, the supposed 'wealth' as its meaning suggests, is an individual not belonging to the familiar stream of average populace. To describe his character, one must pay attention to the following quoted lines of Sri Aurobindo:

A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling Spirit, is then the key-note, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence.  
(*The Life Divine*, p.824)

Sampath desperately seeks for peace, which Sri Aurobindo on a very high plane of spiritual consciousness finds to be the essential foundation of man's irreversible and decisive spiritual evolution. Though, according to Nikhil Kumar, Kiran Desai is not well conversed in yogic consciousness, "she is unmistakably aware of the essentiality of peace which prepares man for his spiritual upliftment; peace which Sampath is seeking. The urge for serenity is found to have taken a firm hold of him as he finds this material life to be 'a prison he had been born into', and all he craves for is nothing but 'freedom' ("Spiritual Seeking in Kiran Desai's Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard"). Reasonably, Sampath inherits eccentricity from his mother's side which persuades him to go away from the 'hullabaloo' or the cry of the mundane life, and consequently he takes refuge in a guava orchard; which epitomises his eccentricity as a tool of resisting the substantial pettiness of humdrum subsistence. It is interesting to note that Sampath is portrayed throughout the text in relation to the natural elements: "Twenty years later, in the very same house and in the very same room, Sampath Chawla, with spider-like legs and arms, thin and worried-looking, lay awake under a fan" (14). If Sampath, the child of Kulfi Chawla, stands as a symbol of Nature, his father is reason incarnated. In fact, Sampath's father is the only rational person portrayed in the first half of the text. Mr Chawla is a representative figure of the rational and civilized world of men, whereas Sampath resembles the vast and indomitable nature. Mr Chawla, as Desai shows, is critical of the politicians, and also about domestic affairs. He is troubled due to the abnormal behaviour of his wife and idiocy of his son:

'Another corrupt politician! Before we are properly out of one international scandal, we are in another. Our politicians are growing careless. They are opening more Swiss bank accounts than they have Gandhi caps to distract us with. Not one truthful politician in the whole country. Yes, our parliament is made of thieves, each one answerable to the prime minister, who is the biggest thief of them all. (20)

Sampath is basically an idler and this is evident when one notes his action of watching a fly 'vibrating like a machine circled lower and lower over the bowl of fruit that had been bought after much deliberation from the fruit stall' (22). When Sampath fails to get any government job, his father calls him 'a cross between potatoes and human being' (26). For Sampath, the civilized world of mankind is too restrictive and lacks the pleasure of experimentation or doing something new. He feels bitter at heart and thinks that his surroundings are detrimental to his mental health. He realizes that he can live the life of blissful solidarity only by escaping from the civilized world of men. His search for a new direction in life is described through a snake imagery:

Sampath thought of snakes that leave the withered rags of their old skins behind and disappear into grass, their presence unbetrays by even a buckle in the foliage; of insects that crack pods and clay shells, that struggle from the warm blindness of silk and membrane to be lost in enormous skies. He thought of how he was leaving the world, a world that made its endless revolutions toward nothing. (48)

On leaving the buildings far behind, he feels the freshness of greenery bloom within his tired frame. Soon he leaps from the window of the bus and runs towards an old orchard visible far up the slope. Finally he climbs up a guava tree and settles among the leaves. In the branches of the tree he experiences calm and contentment, as the writer comments, ‘Yes, he was in the right place at last’ (51). Trees can never be the abode of human beings, for it is open to all sorts of hardships unbearable to a human being. But to Sampath, such a life is a heap of immense joy, he feels himself much closer to Nature itself, and decides to spend all his life in plenty of its bountifulness:

Concealed in the branches of the tree he had climbed, Sampath felt his breathing slow and a wave of peace and contentment overtook him. All about him the orchard was spangled with the sunshine of a November afternoon, webbed by the reflections of the shifting foliage and filled with a liquid intricacy of sun and shadow. The warmth nuzzled against his cheek like the muzzle of an animal . . . Before his eyes, flitting and darting all about him, was a flock of parrots, a vivid jewel-green, chattering and shrieking in the highest of spirits. This scene filled his whole mind and he wondered if he could ever get enough of it. This was the way of riches and this was a king's life, he thought . . . (51)

In a Faustus like manner he even wishes to exchange his life for this luxury of stillness, ‘to be able to stay with his face held toward the afternoon like a sunflower and to learn all there was to know in this orchard: each small insect crawling by the smell of the earth thick beneath the grass; the bristling of leaves; his way easy through the foliage; his tongue around every name’ (51). This binary between nature and culture, between abundance and restriction, between limitlessness and liminality conjures up the essence of the text. The character of Sampath thus undergoes a complete change. From an inactive, depressed young man, he is transformed into a ‘Baba’ or ‘Hermit’ of exceptional wisdom. He does not pay heed to any one; neither to his family members appealing several times to come back, nor to the woman brought before him for a supposed marriage: “Sampath looked down at the veiled woman standing underneath his tree and felt hot and horrified, tiredness rolled over him like a wave and, closing his eyes, he fell into a deep slumber, lodged in a fork in the guava tree” (61).

Mr Chawla is very unhappy to see his son choose a place like guava orchard to live in. He often rebukes Sampath calling him a monkey and a stupid unreasonable fellow: “We must formulate a plan. Only monkeys climb up a tree. . . But for someone to travel a long distance just to sit in a tree was preposterous.” (55) It is none other than his mother who understands his stance, for Kulfi, through her son, could see an early reflection of herself, as if her own selfie mirroring out to get away from the rule bound society. Resolutely, she announces, ‘Let him be’ (55). Sampath first surprises the people beneath his tree by exposing the secret of Mr. Singh about his jewellery, Mrs Chopra about her problem in throat, and a bald-headed man about the secret oil. However, people take it as something spiritual on his part. They regard him as a remarkable man with exceptional character: ‘Clearly there was more to this post-office clerk than to ordinary mortals. In his eyes they had detected a rare spirit’ (67). The local newspaper introduces him to the world by publishing the same: ‘Fleeting duties at the Shahkot post office, a clerk has been reported to have settles in a large guava tree. According to popular speculation, he is one of that unusual spiritual nature, his child-like ways being coupled with unfathomable wisdom’ (67). The responses of Sampath to people’s queries bring out amply his astuteness and



magnetism. His maxims like phrases not only astonish the simple people but also puzzle them. While talking to the people Sampath uses animal imageries to clarify his point:

If you put a chicken on the fire and leave it, in a little while it will no longer be a chicken, but ash and bones. Leave a kettle on the flames, the water will grow hot and then, if someone does not lift it off, it will all boil away until there is nothing left. If your child is playing with a dead smelly mouse, you will not debate: "Should I let him be, should I let him play?" No, you will throw away the mouse and take your child indoors to wash his hands. (75)

With Sampath's hermitance, one thing that also runs parallel is Kulfi's desire to cook food for her son. Sampath's holiness brings in her a new alacrity for cooking, with varieties of ingredients, spices, meats and natural herbs. She discovers in the orchard a special kind of peace. She cooks outdoors in the sunshine under the gigantic sky. While cooking she realizes that she is on the brink of something enormous. All round her is a landscape she understands profoundly, she understands it as she understands her son, she knows why he is sitting in a tree, because, it is the right place for him. Cooking has a cathartic effect on Kulfi's emotions, symbolic of her hidden desires. Common people go crazy with the exotic flavours, marvelling at the ingredients and exotic scents of cloves and cardamom, reminding of one of the mystic world of spices in Chitra Divakruni's *The Mistress of Spices*:

Pickled limes stuffed with cardamom and cumin, crepuscular creatures simmered upon the wood of a scented tree, small river fish baked in green coconuts, rice steamed with nasturtium flowers in the pale hollow of a bamboo stern, mushrooms red- and yellow-gilled, polka-dotted and striped. . . pouring from his eyes, his ears exploding, barely able to breathe, Sampath would beg: 'More! Please, some more.' And triumphantly Kulfi would rush back to get another helping. (102)

Kulfi believes that 'every son knows that there is no cooking like his mother's cooking' (103). Sampath is provided all sorts of comfort at the guava orchard: a cot for sleeping, sufficient food and water resources, and devotees now and then come as worshippers. The money and different kind of items that are offered to the 'Monkey baba' (Sampath's name at the guava orchard) is a stark satire on the commoditisation of religion in the Indian context.

The monkey figure in this story is related to Indian mythology. The Baba (Sampath) loves monkeys – their company, their pranks and feels absolutely at home when they play around him. According to the Hindu mythology, monkeys are the incarnation of the Hindu god Hanuman, and therefore Sampath's love for the monkeys connects him to great god Hanuman. Sampath calls the monkeys by various affectionate names such as "you badmahees" and shows his special affection for them. The reason that he is called a 'Monkey Baba' is because of his deep affection for the monkeys in the orchard:

Look at that monkey. Gentle as anything! The Baba has subdued the beasts. . . The behaviour of the monkeys was just another proclamation of Sampath's authenticity. He was an endless source of wonder. He had even cast his spell upon the wild beasts of the market. (108-109)

The monkeys however, add a touch of ribaldry to the holy situation in the guava orchard. Things become complicated when one day the monkeys in the orchard find five bottles of rum in the bag of a man who had stopped to see Sampath on his way to a wedding. The monkeys consume liquor and become uncontrollable beasts. They leap from one tree to another, and in

doing so fill the ground with twiggy debris. Seeing this activity of the monkeys, one of the devotees in the orchard mentions, 'It is not the monkey's fault. Always men are the degenerated ones' (123). The police come to rescue the devotees from the menace of the monkeys, but little could be done in such a situation:

Caught up in this drunken dance, savage faces, long tails, saris draped in purple and yellow streamers all about him, useless bits of thought flew past Sampath, everything going by too fast for him to stop and grab at them. He could jump; but no, it would be his undoing. He could pull on the monkeys' tails; no, he would shout. No, he had better hold tight . . . (131)

Sampath's father, who has been exploiting his son's new role of a 'messiah' in order to gain commercial profits, feels threatened by the destructive activities of the monkeys and approaches the District Collector and the other top officials "to make it clear that it was their responsibility to do something about this disruption to sanctity and peace Shahkot" (132). The SP, DC and other top officials, a CMO, a lady from a Monkey Protection society, a bird watching Brigadier from a local army outpost, a spy from the Atheist Society and the members of Sampath's family all get entangled in this muddle. All of them suggest different plans to catch the monkeys engaged in ravaging and looting throughout the town. Some propose to convince Sampath to get down from the tree, because they believe that Sampath is the idol of the monkeys and if he leaves the orchard then the monkeys will not find any inspiration to continue the destructive work. But Sampath is resolute and his reply shows his deep attachment with nature:

"I am not going to live anywhere but in this tree,' said Sampath. 'And the monkeys are not drunk right now. They are only playing.' When his father had gone he realized his heart was thumping. He could not get the horrible thought out of his mind. Leave his tree? Never. Never ever, he thought, his body trembling with indignation." (127)

Kiran Desai's first novel apparently seems to be farcical in its presentation, but it critiques the real world of humans. The environment shift in her novel to 'fantastic realism' turns the theme into an uncanny mix of fantasy and magic. The matter of the novel is critiquing the 'normal' world besides the supernatural perception of some characters that show how the 'other' world has so much more to offer to the primary world. It reflects upon the 'alternate realities' of life, nature, animal world and finally man as the supreme power, who gains the perception of looking beyond the realities of everyday life. The writer is inviting the reader to react to the 'environment' of the story as text, from which the final message comes: the destruction of nature eventually leads to destruction of man. Nature in this novel is a powerful symbol, representative of the fantastic world, which is constantly desired by man, but is also drastically misused. Desai presents nature as an integral component of human life. The novel begins with a description of a horrible facet of nature, where people and environment around them, wither under intense heat. Men try to invent many artificial ways of bringing rain to alleviate the heat, but nothing works, which highlights the supremacy of nature. Later in the text, nature is intrinsically related to the monkeys, parallelly existent in the lives of the people of Shahkot. Initially the cinema monkey, and then the whole herd abiding in that orchard spark a war against the two forces – man and nature. Humanization of monkeys and their change as alcoholics symbolises a speculum of evil in man. Their affair with alcohol invests them with human qualities of assault and thievery. It helps in artificially expanding their energies, leading them to ravage the forests in a dire drastic way. The guava orchard, then hardly remains an orchard, it turns into an extension of the

township, a microcosm of the outer world, where animal beings, the direct product of the nature revolt against its milieu. The monkeys proved to be a sinister harm against humanity, and the rest of the novels deal with the various plans and propositions to bring back the sanity. The problem that arises is that without the monkeys, Sampath had no existence of himself as a ‘Man-god’, the representation of divinity itself. What he actually wanted, a life surrounded with monkeys in that serenity of guava orchard, was no longer there. His mental peace was diminishing with his physical health also. The extraordinary meals cooked by his mother bring about a permanent nausea and inactivity in him. Kulfi’s excitement for preparing a new meal, with the flesh of monkey, brings a new energy in her cooking. Everything was set, the Brigadier and others chose the last day of April as the day of execution, when everything will be controlled in order, and Kulfi prepared her cauldron so that a monkey will directly fall from the tree and will be cooked there helplessly. The story ends with Sampath’s disappearance, and the failed efforts to trap and kill the monkeys. Symbolically a man gets cooked instead of a monkey, reflecting how our evil desires turn upon us. At the end, there was nothing clearly said about the disappearance of Sampath. Only a guava is left with a brown birthmark stain, which is taken away none other than the Cinema monkey.

‘Wait,’ shrieked Ammaji. ‘Give me that fruit. Wait! Sampath! Sampath!’  
But the Cinema Monkey picked up the fruit himself before anybody had time to move and, calm-eyed and wise, holding it close to his chest, with the other monkeys following in a band; he leapt from the guava tree’s branches and bounded away. (208)

Kulfi and Sampath, are thus, related to two different levels of reality. Though they are more perceptive, less ‘normal’ than other characters in the novel, Kulfi perceives the world around her like a fantasy, while Sampath’s level of reality of the world is too real for the rest to perceive, but it reveals that reality is ever changing and is not just located in the mind. The novel thus, is a kind of satire on humanity. Firstly, it begins with the description of nature given in the newspaper, where man’s artificial tries for controlling nature went in vein, inevitably with the unavoidable truth that Nature cannot be rule bounded like others. Then the description of Kulfi, her abnormality and lascivious desire for food, both taking and making, adds another hue to the text. The family’s opposition and Sampath’s escape from the mundane life to the customary primordiality; Nature was firstly altogether rejected by the family, but when it provided monetary support to the whole family, then Sampath’s fake existence as a ‘Monkey Baba’ was formed by them. Even when, the monkeys’ appearance proves harmful to the local citizens, without thinking Sampath’s views, they thought to remove him from his place. It is obviously hinted, that the monkeys got furious only for the unintended fault by humanity, which not only made them mischievous but also greedy and destructing power-players. Their confrontation against civilization as well as green habitation proved them as enemy to all. Man’s misuse of nature how much can affect its surroundings; this novel is a quintessence of that kind.

When seen from the perspective of the criticisms of Glotfelty and Buell, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* assumes a different significance. Glotfelty’s remark in his famous quote on ecocriticism elucidates the idea that as a critical tool, ecocriticism is a practical mode of analysing literature. This apparently funny tale comprising the monkeys and the ‘Monkey-Baba’ become significant after we see the severe damage caused by man on natural world. The monkeys get alcoholic and start destructing the human as well as natural vegetation. In this way, the settings -- both the Shahkot and the guava orchard serve an important role paving the ways for ecocritical analysis. If we take into account Glotfelty’s most significant question: “In what

ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture?" (Glotfelty & Fromm xvii), then the concluding portion of my analysis of the text shows how this battle between the nature and the man has cast a shadow of doom over everything. Finally, I would like to quote from *The Ecocriticism Reader* again to complete my discussion on Glotfelty:

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (Glotfelty xix)

Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1996) attempts to lay the groundwork for environmentally aware readings of literary texts, and to suggest the future direction of the ecocritical research program. Buell quite correctly emphasizes on our ability to become intimate with nature, over and against the tendency of some theorists to assume the entire otherness of nature and to question the efforts of natural science to learn something about that otherness. But though it may be true that "the emphasis on disjunction between text and world seems overblown," (Buell 84) it is not at all clear to me how a "spirit of commitment to environmental praxis" is sufficient to join together what theory has supposedly put asunder (Buell 84). In the novel, Kulfi Chawla is intimately related to nature, actually she is described here as the nature-incarnated. Her activities, roaming about endlessly in search of new ingredients, her insatiable hunger, and the mysterious cooking – all attribute her greater affinity with the nature's persona. Following Buell, we also find that nature, as described in this novel is more an ideological abstract ideal, an epitome of perfection; and this is the reason for which Sampath Chawla has discarded his material home, in search of a spiritual one. Another important thing that I like to mention here is the concept of 'pastoral' proposed by Buell. Pastoral, undoubtedly one of the most universal form of Western Environmental imagination which is almost synonymous with the idea of returning to a less urbanised, more natural state of existence:

Historically, pastoral has sometimes activated a 'green' consciousness, sometimes euphemized land appropriation. It may direct us toward the realm of physical nature, or it may abstract us from it . . . the modern transmutation that concerns me most is the *enlistment of pastoral in the service of local, regional and national particularism*. (Buell 31)

Reading from this perspective, Sampath's leaving of his own home, and his disagreeing at the end to leave the guava orchard can be critically looked from an ecocritical observing eye. It must be mentioned here that like other environmental novelists, Desai does not emphasize on anthropocentric prejudice against ecological loss, neither does she point out the issues of deep ecology or bio diversity. Rather she has shown here the piercing affair of habitat formation, how human addiction for alcoholic drinks can altogether bring about an extreme change in the entire ecosystem upsetting down its own design. Conceptualizing from this facet, this seemingly amusing tale thus becomes an envoy of ecocritical sagacity.



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